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# Labour Force, Australia

Headline estimates of employment, unemployment, underemployment, participation and hours worked from the monthly Labour Force Survey

Reference period December 2020

Released 21/01/2021

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## Key statistics

Seasonally adjusted estimates for December 2020:

- Unemployment rate decreased to 6.6%.
- Participation rate increased to 66.2%.
- Employment increased to 12,910,800.

- Employment to population ratio increased to 61.8%.
- Underemployment rate decreased to 8.5%.
- Monthly hours worked increased by 2 million hours.

	Nov-2020	Dec-2020	Monthly change	Monthly change (%)	Yearly change	Yearly change (%)
<b>Seasonally adjusted</b>						
<b>Employed people</b>	12,860,700	12,910,800	50,000	0.4%	-63,900	-0.5%
<b>Unemployed people</b>	942,100	912,000	-30,100	-3.2%	221,700	32.1%
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	6.8%	6.6%	-0.2 pts	na	1.5 pts	na
<b>Underemployment rate</b>	9.4%	8.5%	-0.8 pts	na	0.3 pts	na
<b>Participation rate</b>	66.1%	66.2%	0.1 pts	na	0.2 pts	na
<b>Monthly hours worked in all jobs</b>	1,752 million	1,753 million	2 million	0.1%	-26 million	-1.5%

Estimates of changes throughout this release are calculated using un-rounded level estimates and may be different from, but are more accurate than, movements obtained from the rounded level estimates.

## Survey impacts and changes

### Managing the impact of COVID-19 on labour force statistics

The ABS is continuing to take active steps to manage the impacts of COVID-19 on Labour Force statistics. For more information on recent developments, refer to the [Rotation group analysis \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#data-download\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#data-download).

### Survey response and timeline

The December Labour Force Survey was run in respect of the two weeks from Sunday 29 November to Saturday 12 December, and collected over the period from Sunday 6 December to Tuesday 22 December.



The ABS would like to thank Australians for their continued support in responding to our surveys during such a difficult time, given how critically important this information is.

## Continued suspension of trend estimates

Given the extent of change in Labour Force time series, the ABS has temporarily suspended trend series and moved to using forward factors for seasonal adjustment. All estimates within the commentary, including information for the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, refer to seasonally adjusted data. For more information, please refer to '[Suspension of trend series and changes to seasonal adjustment during the COVID-19 period](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/apr-2020#covid-19-impacts-and-changes)' ([/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/apr-2020#covid-19-impacts-and-changes](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/apr-2020#covid-19-impacts-and-changes)).

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## Seasonal Adjustment

Starting with the April 2020 release, the ABS began using forward seasonal factors to produce seasonally adjusted Labour Force estimates. The forward factors approach is better suited to managing seasonal adjustment during a period of sustained disruption. Further information on forward factors is provided on [this page \(https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/methods-changes-during-covid-19-period#abs-trend-and-seasonal-adjustment-during-covid-19\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/methods-changes-during-covid-19-period#abs-trend-and-seasonal-adjustment-during-covid-19) describing method changes during COVID-19. A review of the Labour Force seasonal adjustment approach will be conducted before April data is published (20 May). Further information regarding this review will be available in the release of January Labour Force data, on 18 February.

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## Treatment of people on JobKeeper, JobSeeker or stood down

People paid through the JobKeeper wage subsidy, in receipt of JobSeeker payments, or stood down by their employer are classified as follows in the Labour Force Survey. This approach:

- is consistent with the long-standing concepts and practices used in the Labour Force Survey; and
- has not resulted in any changes to the [Labour Force Survey questionnaire \(https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/dec-2020#data-download\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/dec-2020#data-download).

The ABS will update this information if new scenarios emerge or the conditions of existing scenarios change over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1. People paid through the JobKeeper wage subsidy: employed

The ABS expects that people who are paid through the JobKeeper scheme will answer the questions in a way that results in them being classified as employed, regardless of the hours they work (e.g. even if they are stood down). People paid through JobKeeper may work less hours, the same hours, or more hours, than usual.

Under the JobKeeper program, eligible businesses and not-for-profit organisations affected by COVID-19 can elect to receive a subsidy to support their employment of eligible employees. Some self-employed people are also eligible to receive the JobKeeper payment.

Employers will pay these employees a wage, within their existing employment relationship, supporting an ongoing attachment to a job.

## **2. People in receipt of the JobSeeker payment: it depends on their labour market activity**

People who receive the JobSeeker or other similar government payments are not automatically classified as unemployed (just as those classified as unemployed will not necessarily be in receipt of a government payment) and how they are categorised depends on how they answer questions around labour market activity.

The JobSeeker payment is paid to people who are looking for work or are sick or injured and cannot undertake their usual work or study for a short time, and who meet the eligibility requirements. People can also receive the JobSeeker payment if they have a job, if they meet a low income test.

Recent changes to the JobSeeker program related to COVID-19 also meant that some recipients did not have to meet the usual mutual obligation requirements, such as looking for work. As these obligations are reinstated, changes may lead to increases in active job search and an increase in the number of people classified as unemployed in future months.

To be classified as unemployed in Labour Force statistics, a person must:

- have actively looked for full-time or part-time work in the last four weeks; and
- be available for work in the reference week.

People who were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then are also classified as unemployed.

## **3. People not working any hours, including those who were stood down: it depends on their job attachment and pay, and potentially other labour market activity**

A person will be classified as employed if they:

- had taken any kind of paid leave;
- were away from their job for any reason (e.g. they were stood down), and were paid for some part of the previous 4 weeks (which could include wages subsidised through the JobKeeper scheme); or

- were away from their job for four weeks or less for any reason, without pay, but believe they still have a job to go back to (e.g. they were stood down, with no pay).

If a person is away from their job for four weeks or more without pay, or they believe they no longer have a job to be absent from, they will be classified as:

- unemployed - if they have actively looked for work, and are available to start work; or
- not in the labour force - if they have not looked for work and/or are not available to start work.

There will be a range of ways in which people will have been stood down without work as a result of COVID-19. Some may be stood down with pay, some through paid leave (e.g. long service leave, annual leave, etc) and some without pay. Some people will perceive that they still have a job (but just no hours at the moment), while others will consider they have lost their job.

These differences are effectively captured using Labour Force Survey questions, which support the ABS to effectively categorise people and produce key measures of the labour market.

People stood down without pay from late March through to early May were away from their job for four weeks or more and therefore were no longer considered employed in May. This explains part of the further fall in employment in May.

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For further information, please email [labour.statistics@abs.gov.au](mailto:labour.statistics@abs.gov.au) (<mailto:labour.statistics@abs.gov.au>).

## Articles and other information

This month's Labour Force release includes additional analysis of hours worked, including for those people working zero hours for economic reasons (see [Insights into hours worked \(https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/insights-hours-worked-december-2020\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/insights-hours-worked-december-2020)), and Underemployment (see [Underemployment: Reduced hours or prefers more hours \(https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/underemployment-reduced-hours-or-prefers-more-hours\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/underemployment-reduced-hours-or-prefers-more-hours)). For a list of previously published LFS articles, see the [Article archive \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/dec-2020#article-archive\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/dec-2020#article-archive).

Additional spreadsheets and pivot tables are published in [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed)

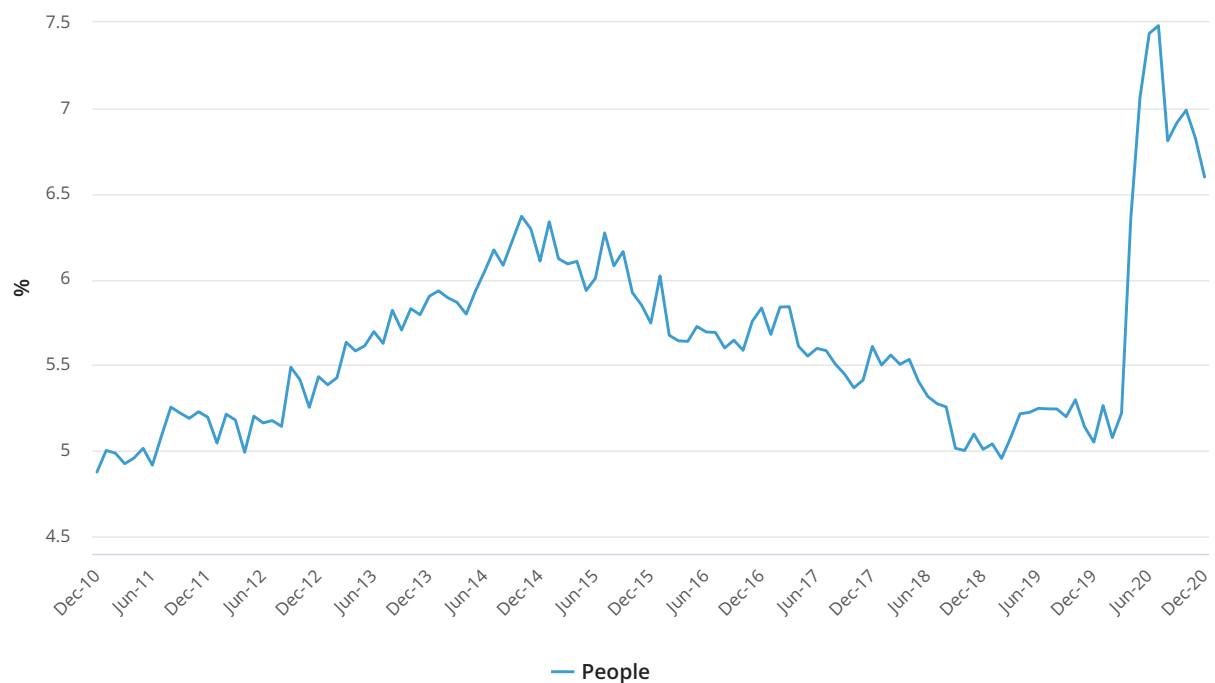
[detailed/latest-release](#)) one week after this release, while longitudinal labour force microdata are released in the ABS DataLab, one day after the detailed release (see [Microdata: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6602.0History+of+Changes0Australia\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6602.0History+of+Changes0Australia)).

## Unemployment

In seasonally adjusted terms, in December 2020:

- The unemployment rate decreased 0.2 pts to 6.6% (1.5 pts higher than a year ago)
- Unemployed people decreased by 30,100 to 912,000 (and increased by 221,700 over the year to December 2020)
- The youth unemployment rate decreased 1.7 pts to 13.9% (and increased by 2.3 pts over the year to December 2020)

### Unemployment rate, Seasonally adjusted



# Employment

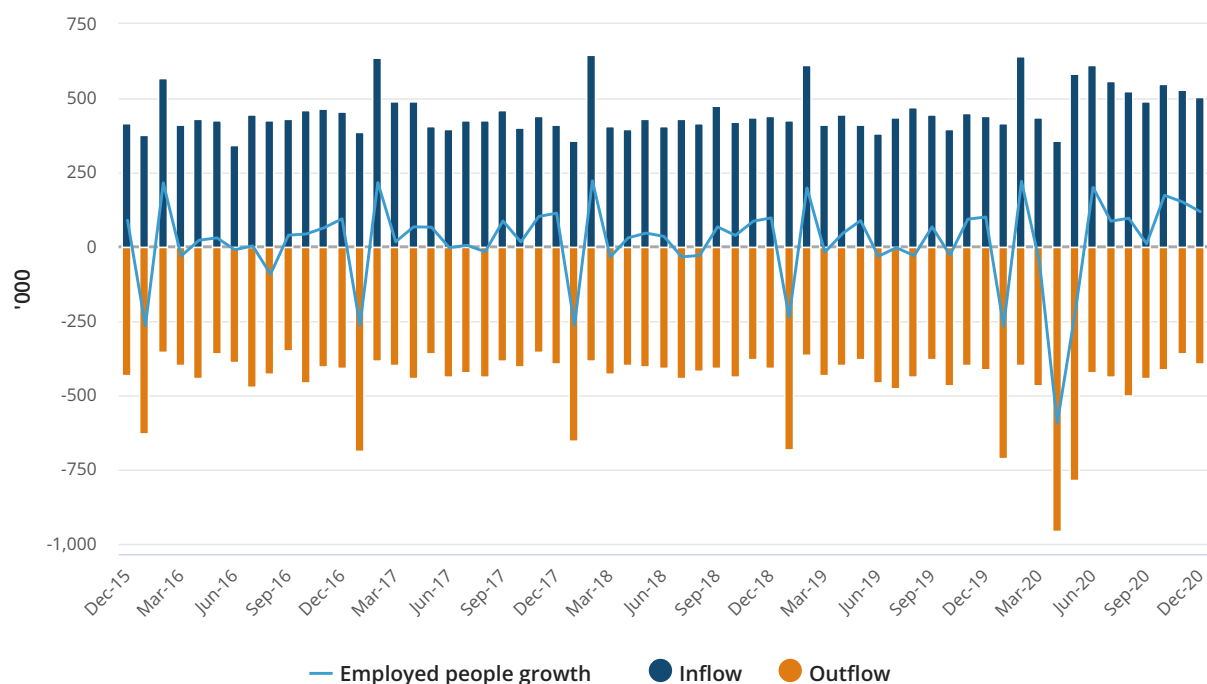
In seasonally adjusted terms, in December 2020:

- Employment increased by 50,000 people (0.4%) to 12,910,800 people
- Over the year to December 2020, employment decreased by 0.5% or 63,900 people

## Flows into and out of employment

Underpinning this net increase in the number of employed people are extensive flows of people into and out of employment. Around 500,000 people entered employment (i.e. they were not employed in November but were employed in December), while around 390,000 people left employment (i.e. they were employed in November but were not employed in December). This contrasts with the previous month, where around 530,000 people entered employment and around 360,000 people left employment.

## Monthly inflows, outflows and employment growth, Original



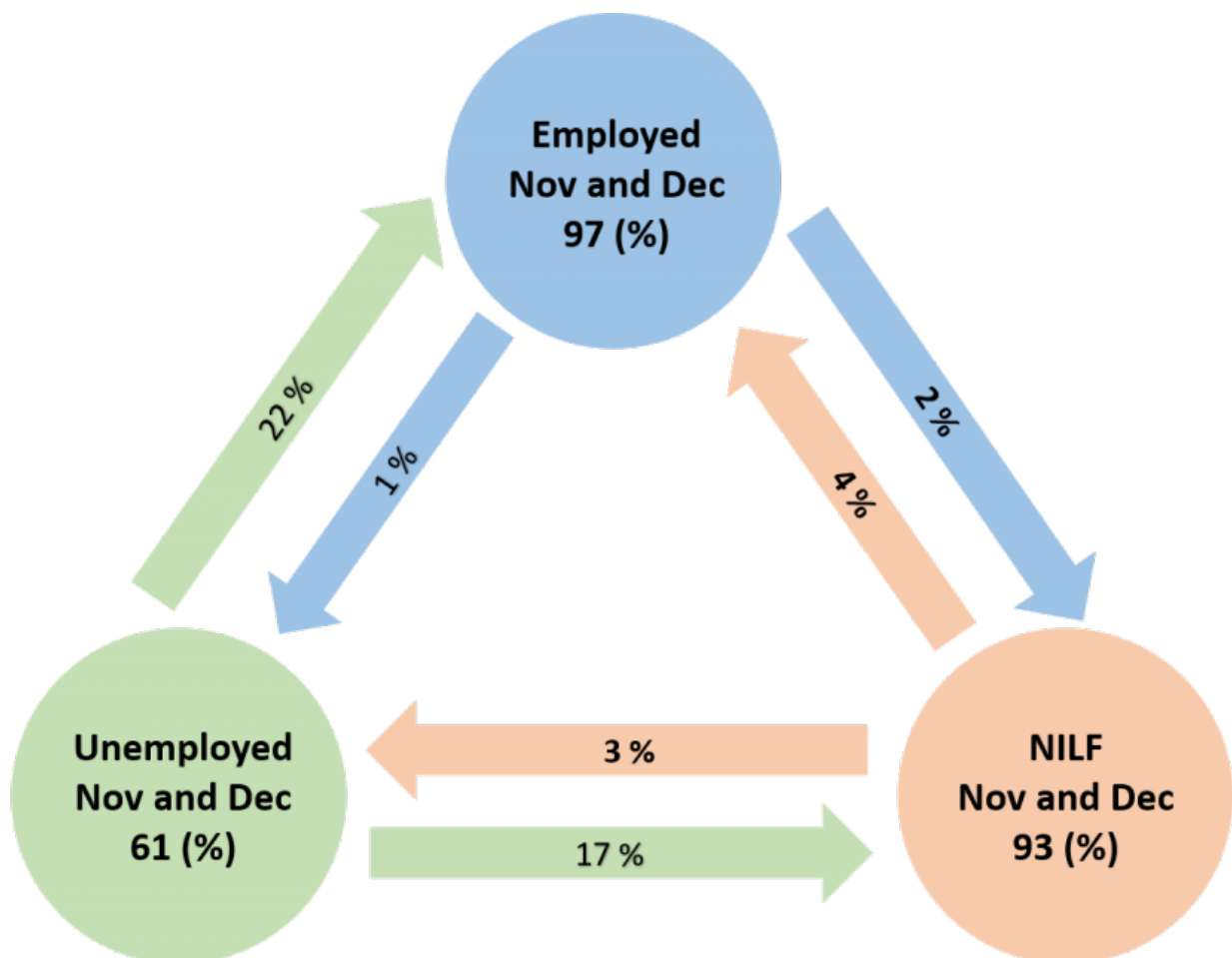
Note: As the inflows and outflows analysis is based on the matched sample (around 80% of the sample), and the original employment growth is based on the entire sample and the latest months weight, the (net) sum of the inflows and outflows does not necessarily equal the 'net' employment growth.



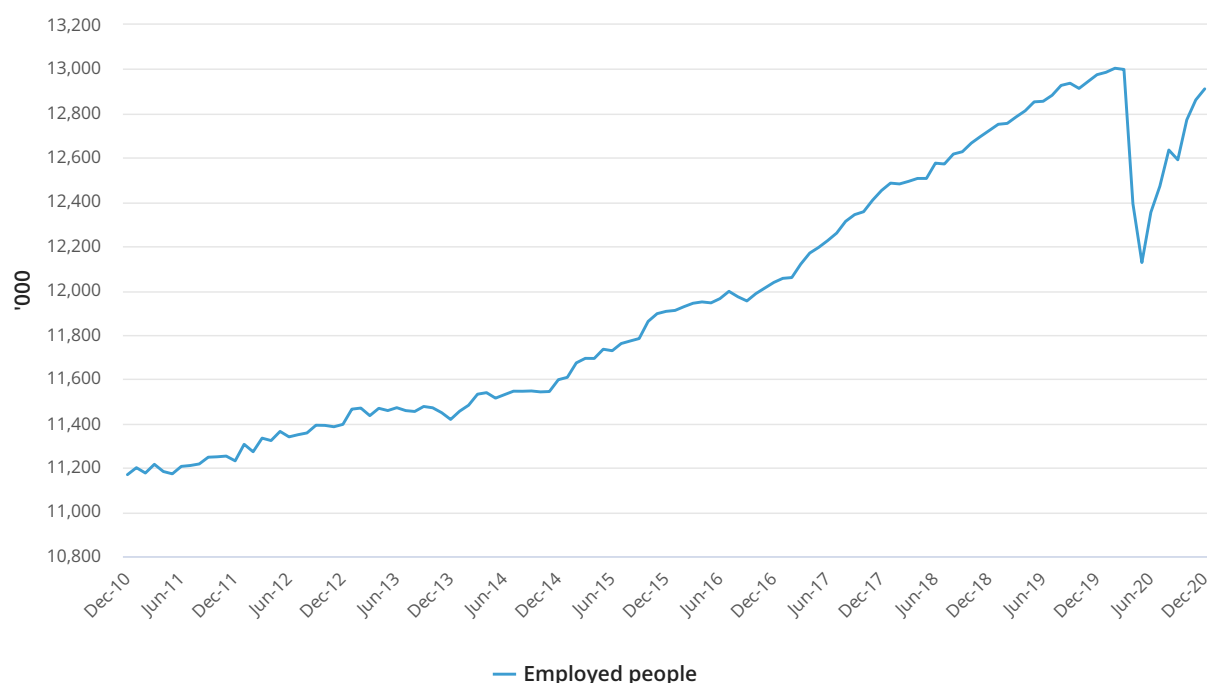
The following diagram shows the proportion of people moving between employment, unemployment and not in the labour force between November and December (based on the matched sample). It shows that:

- 97% of people employed in November were also employed in December (with 1% moving to unemployment and 2% to not in the labour force)
- 61% of people unemployed in November were also unemployed in December (with 22% moving to employment and 17% to not in the labour force)
- 93% of people not in the labour force in November were also not in the labour force in December (with 4% moving to employment and 3% to unemployment)

#### Flows in labour force status, November to December



## Employed people, Seasonally adjusted



## Full-time and part-time employment

In seasonally adjusted terms, in December 2020:

- Full-time employment increased by 35,700 to 8,761,400 people, and part-time employment increased by 14,300 to 4,149,300 people
- Over the year to December 2020, full-time employment decreased by 75,900 people and part-time employment increased by 12,000 people
- The part-time share of employment over the past 12 months, increased 0.3 pts to 32.1%

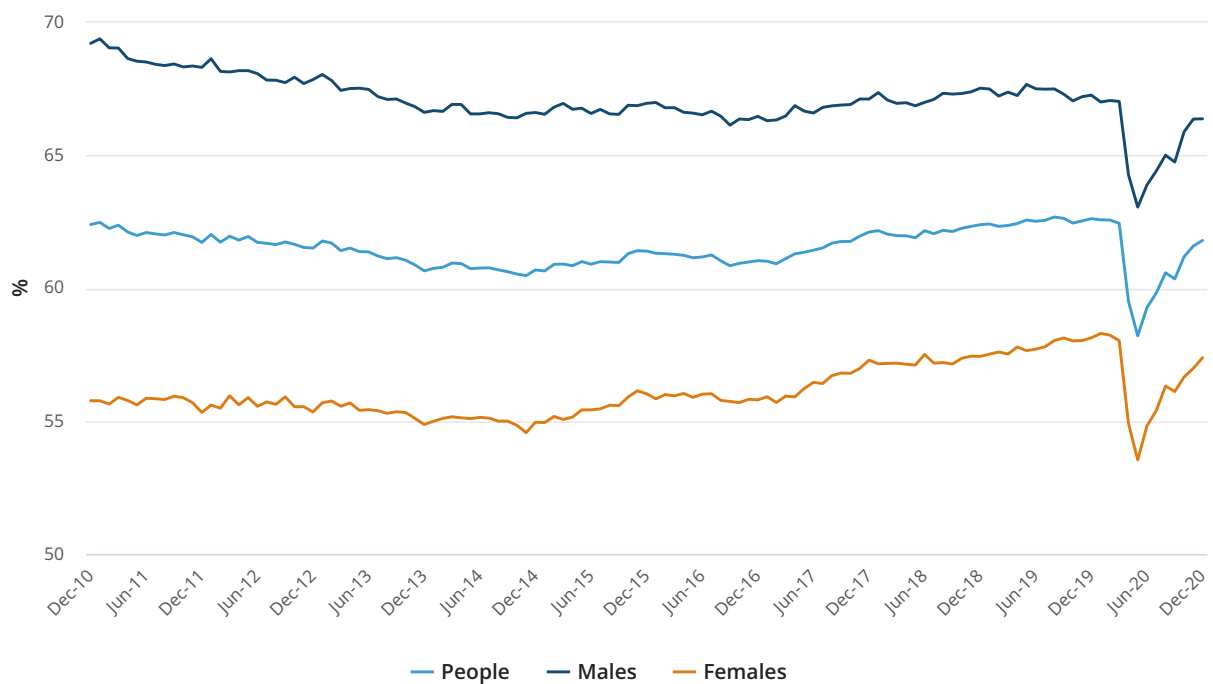
## Employment-to-population ratio

In seasonally adjusted terms, in December 2020:

- The employment-to-population ratio increased by 0.2 pts to 61.8%, and decreased by 0.8 pts from the same time last year

The employment-to-population ratio provides a measure of employment relative to the size of the population.

## Employment-to-population ratio, Seasonally adjusted



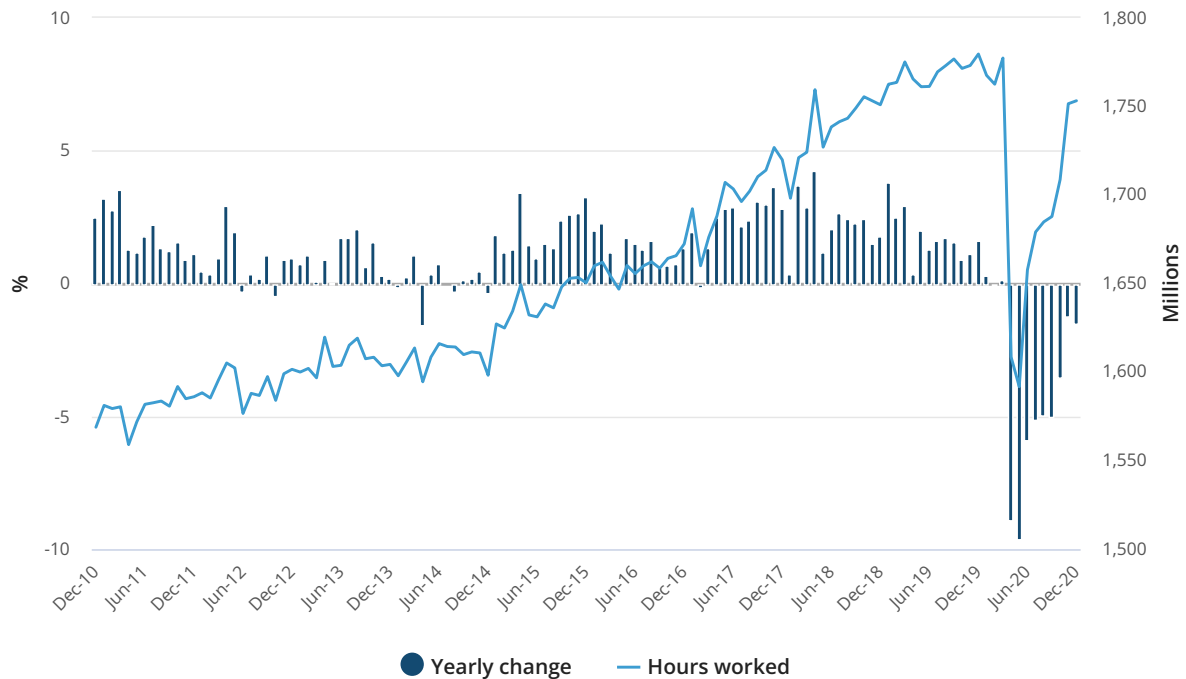
## Hours worked

In seasonally adjusted terms, in December 2020, monthly hours worked in all jobs:

- Increased by 1.686 million hours (0.1%) to 1,753 million hours
- Decreased by 1.5% over the year, which is larger than the 0.5% decrease in employed people

See the article [Insights into hours worked \(https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/insights-hours-worked-december-2020\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/insights-hours-worked-december-2020) for more.

## Monthly hours worked in all jobs, Seasonally adjusted

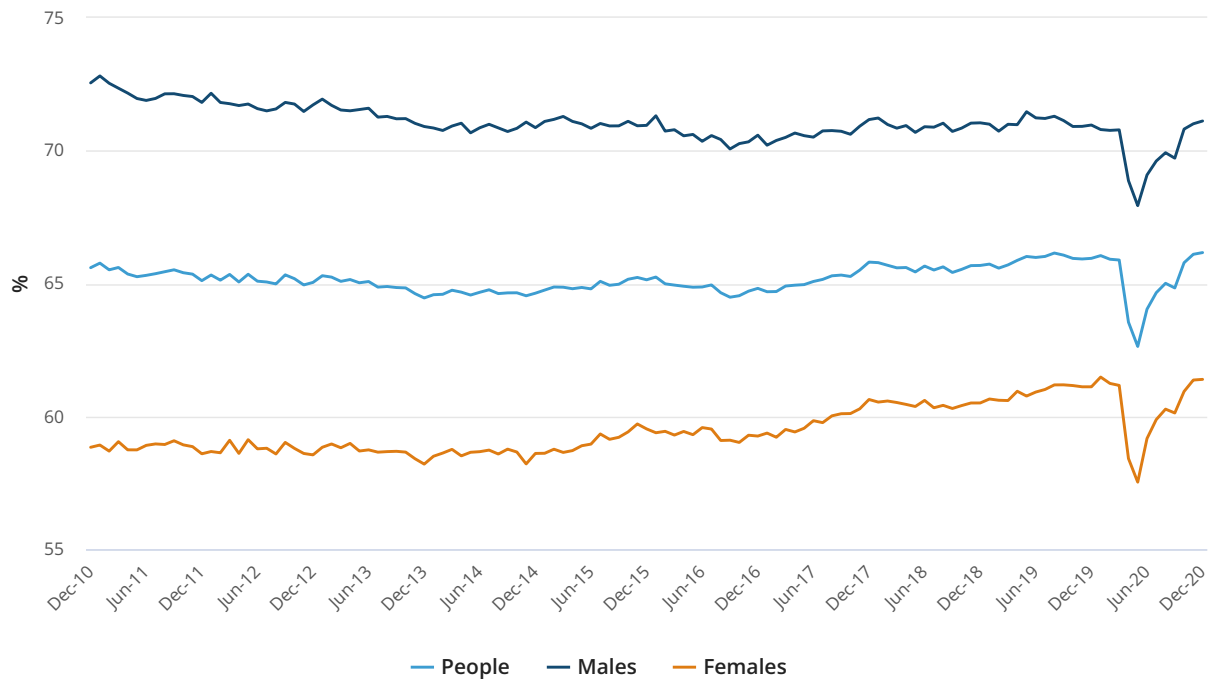


## Participation

In seasonally adjusted terms, in December 2020, the participation rate:

- Increased by 0.1 pts to 66.2%, and increased 0.2 pts over the year to December 2020
- Increased by 0.1 pts for men (to 71.1%) and remained at 61.4% for women

## Participation rate, Seasonally adjusted



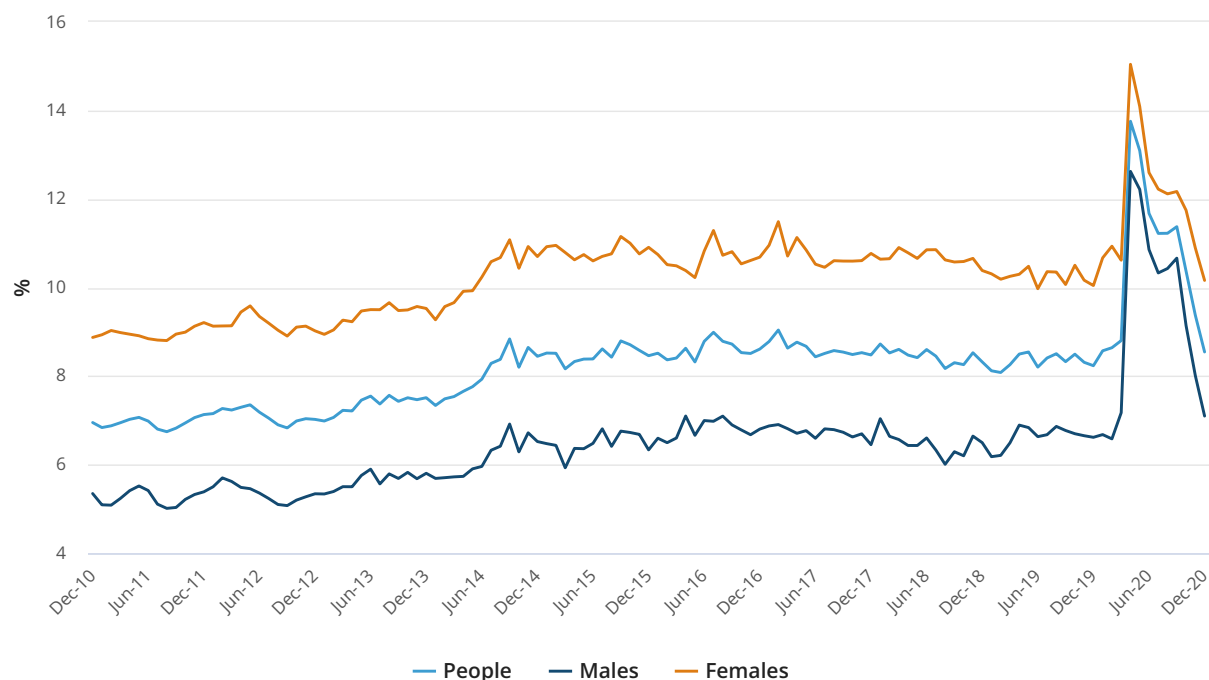
## Underemployment

In seasonally adjusted terms, in December 2020:

- The underemployment rate decreased by 0.8 pts to 8.5% (0.3 pts higher than a year ago)
- The underutilisation rate decreased by 1.1 pts to 15.1%

See the article [Underemployment: Reduced hours or prefers more hours \(https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/underemployment-reduced-hours-or-prefers-more-hours\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/underemployment-reduced-hours-or-prefers-more-hours) for more.

## Underemployment rate, Seasonally adjusted



## States and territories

### December 2020, Seasonally adjusted

	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	South Australia	Western Australia	Tasmania	Northern Territory
Employed people	4,076,400	3,385,800	2,579,900	852,400	1,379,900	254,100	
Employed people - monthly change	-0.4%	0.4%	1.4%	-0.1%	0.0%	0.3%	
Employment to population ratio	61.4%	61.7%	61.7%	58.6%	64.3%	56.8%	
Employment to population ratio - monthly change	-0.3 pts	0.2 pts	0.8 pts	0.0 pts	0.0 pts	0.1 pts	

	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	South Australia	Western Australia	Tasmania	North Territory
Unemployment rate	6.4%	6.5%	7.5%	6.4%	6.2%	7.0%	
Unemployment rate - monthly change	-0.1 pts	-0.6 pts	-0.2 pts	0.2 pts	-0.1 pts	-0.9 pts	
Underemployment rate	8.4%	9.0%	8.6%	10.4%	7.7%	9.8%	
Underemployment rate - monthly change	-0.4 pts	-1.6 pts	-0.8 pts	-0.3 pts	-0.3 pts	-0.5 pts	
Participation rate	65.5%	66.0%	66.7%	62.5%	68.6%	61.1%	
Participation rate - monthly change	-0.4 pts	-0.2 pts	0.7 pts	0.1 pts	-0.1 pts	-0.4 pts	

## Rotation group analysis

### Sample composition and rotation

The Labour Force Survey sample can be thought of as comprising eight sub-samples (rotation groups), with each sub-sample remaining in the survey for eight months, and one group "rotating out" each month and being replaced by a new group "rotating in". As seven-eighths of the sample are common from one month to the next, changes in the estimates reflect real changes in the labour market, rather than changes in the sample. The replacement sample is generally selected from the same geographic areas as the outgoing one, as part of a representative sampling approach.

The sample comprises three components:

- the matched common sample (people who responded in both the current month and previous month)
- the unmatched common sample (people who responded in the current month but who did not respond in the previous month, or vice versa)
- the incoming rotation group (replacing people who rotated out)

The matched common sample describes the change observed for the same respondents in the current and previous month, while the other two components reflect differences between the aggregate labour force status of different groups of people.

While the rotation groups are designed to be representative of the population, the outgoing

and incoming rotation groups will almost always have somewhat different characteristics, as they reflect different households and people. The design of the survey, including the weighting and estimation processes, ensures that these differences are generally relatively minor and do not affect the representativeness of the survey and its estimates. Monthly estimates are designed to be representative, regardless of the relative contribution of the three components of the sample.

The contributions of the three sample components to the original estimates of employed, unemployed and not in the labour force are in the Contribution from sample components to estimates spreadsheet.

## Estimates for the incoming and outgoing rotation groups

### Incoming and outgoing rotation groups

	November outgoing rotation group	December incoming rotation group	December outgoing rotation group	December estimate (Original)
Employment to population ratio	61.3%	64.2%	60.9%	62.4%
Full-time employment to population ratio	41.3%	44.4%	40.5%	42.6%
Unemployment rate	5.4%	6.6%	5.3%	6.3%
Participation rate	64.8%	68.7%	64.2%	66.6%

## States and territories

In addition to analysis across the entire sample, the ABS also undertakes similar analysis for the responding sample in each state and territory each month, and highlights where there is a notable change for users to be aware of. For example, in November 2020, the incoming rotation group in Queensland had a higher unemployment rate than the group it replaced, and had a higher unemployment rate than the average over the matched sample. As with any notable month-to-month movement of this nature in state and territory estimates, the ABS recommends exercising a degree of caution in interpreting short-term changes.

As for its reporting for the entire sample, where the ABS has not highlighted a notable incoming rotation group effect, any larger changes should therefore be considered to reflect a broader change across the sample.



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## Managing COVID-19 impacts on the incoming rotation groups

In response to COVID-19 and the suspension of face-to-face interviewing, the ABS has boosted the size of sample for the incoming rotation groups from June 2020 onwards to around the same level as pre-COVID-19 rotation groups. This has ensured a comparable level of fully responding households to the pre-COVID period.

Between April and September additional weighting treatments were used to effectively account for a slightly higher level of non-response. No such treatment was required in October, November or December, with the response patterns returning close to the pre-COVID period.

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## Comparability with seasonally adjusted data

The gross flows and rotation group data are in original terms only, and are included to provide additional information on the month-to-month movements. They have a considerable level of inherent sampling variability, which is specifically adjusted for in the seasonally adjusted series.

While trend data usually provides the best measure of the underlying behaviour of the labour market, in times of large changes in the labour market, seasonally adjusted data provides a better estimate of the most recent months. The ABS has temporarily suspended the trend series until labour market indicators become more stable, see [Suspension of trend series and changes to seasonal adjustment during the COVID-19 period \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/apr-2020#covid-19-impacts-and-changes\)](#).

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## Contribution from sample components to estimates

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[99.5 KB]

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## Data downloads

Labour Force Survey results are released in three stages.

1. Spreadsheets of the headline indicators are published in this release
2. Additional, more detailed spreadsheets and pivot tables are published in [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release\)](#) one week after this first release

3. Longitudinal labour force microdata are released in the ABS DataLab on a monthly basis, one day after the detailed release (see [Microdata: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6602.0History+of+Changes0Australia\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6602.0History+of+Changes0Australia).)

See the [Survey output \(/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/dec-2020#survey-output\)](/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/dec-2020#survey-output) section of Labour Force, Australia methodology for more information.

## Labour Force status

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Table 1. Labour force status by Sex, Australia - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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Table 4. Labour force status by Sex, New South Wales - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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[4.26 MB]

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Table 5. Labour force status by Sex, Victoria - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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Table 6. Labour force status by Sex, Queensland - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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Table 7. Labour force status by Sex, South Australia - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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[4.3 MB]

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Table 8. Labour force status by Sex, Western Australia - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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Table 9. Labour force status by Sex, Tasmania - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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Table 10. Labour force status by Sex, Northern Territory - Trend and Original

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Table 10a. Labour force status by Sex, Northern Territory - Seasonally adjusted

↓ [Download XLS](#)

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Table 11. Labour force status by Sex, Australian Capital Territory - Trend and Original

↓ [Download XLS](#)

[4.43 MB]

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Table 11a. Labour force status by Sex, Australian Capital Territory - Seasonally adjusted

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[277 KB]

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Table 12. Labour force status by Sex, State and Territory - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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[41.92 MB]

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Table 12a. Labour force status by Sex, Territory - Seasonally adjusted

↓ [Download XLS](#)

[482.5 KB]

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Table 13. Labour force status for 15-24 year olds by Sex - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

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[6.95 MB]

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Table 15. Labour force status for 15-24 year olds by Educational attendance (full-time) and Sex

↓ [Download XLS](#)

[1.6 MB]

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Table 16. Labour force status for 15-24 year olds by State, Territory and Educational attendance (full-time)

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[8.49 MB]

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Table 17. Labour force status for 15-19 year olds by Sex - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

↓ [Download XLS](#)

[5.33 MB]

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Table 18. Labour force status for 15-64 year olds by Sex - Trend, Seasonally

## adjusted and Original

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[6.94 MB]

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## Hours worked

Table 19. Monthly hours worked in all jobs by Employed full-time, part-time and Sex and by State and Territory - Trend and Seasonally adjusted

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[3.09 MB]

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Table 19a. Monthly hours worked in all jobs by Employed full-time, part-time and Sex and Territory - Seasonally adjusted

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[94.5 KB]

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Table 21. Quarterly hours worked in all jobs by Market and Non-market sector - Seasonally adjusted

↓ [Download XLS](#)  
[82.5 KB]

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## Underemployment and underutilisation

Table 22. Underutilised persons by Age and Sex - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

↓ [Download XLS](#)  
[46.02 MB]

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Table 23. Underutilised persons by State and Territory and Sex - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original

↓ [Download XLS](#)  
[62.2 MB]

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Table 23a. Underutilised persons by Territory and Sex - Seasonally adjusted

↓ [Download XLS](#)  
[719 KB]

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Table 24. Underutilised persons by Age and Sex (expanded analytical series)

↓ [Download XLS](#)  
[792 KB]

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Table 25. Underutilised persons by State, Territory and Sex (expanded analytical series)

↓ [Download XLS](#)  
[660 KB]

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## Flows into and out of employment

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## GM1 - Labour force status and Gross changes (flows) by Age, Sex, State and Territory, February 1991 onwards

↓ [Download XLSX](#)

[96.83 MB]

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## All time series spreadsheets

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### All time series spreadsheets

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[41.93 MB]

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## Article archive

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### Understanding the labour force

[Understanding differences between Labour Force employment statistics and Weekly Payroll Jobs \(/articles/understanding-differences-between-labour-force-employment-statistics-and-weekly-payroll-jobs\)](#) (April 2020)

[Classifying people during the COVID-19 period \(https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/classifying-people-labour-force-survey-during-covid-19-period\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/classifying-people-labour-force-survey-during-covid-19-period) (March 2020)

[Labour Force Explained \(https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/labour+force+explained\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/labour+force+explained) (September 2017)

[Understanding the Australian labour force using ABS statistics \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main%20Features999Dec%202013\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main%20Features999Dec%202013) (December 2013)

[Understanding full-time / part-time status in the Labour Force Survey \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main%20Features4Sep%202013\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main%20Features4Sep%202013) (September 2013)

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## Previous catalogue number

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## Methodology

[Labour Force, Australia methodology, December 2020](#)